



PO Box 3276  
Victoria Gardens  
Richmond, Vic 3121

Mob: 0400-558-772

[info@australianbrumbyalliance.org.au](mailto:info@australianbrumbyalliance.org.au)  
[www.australianbrumbyalliance.org.au](http://www.australianbrumbyalliance.org.au)

ABN: 90784718191

## ABA recommendations and offers of assistance to Parks Victoria “Thinking outside the Square”

Observation is the first essential step in the scientific method and thinking is the second. Proposing an hypothesis is the third, and testing is the fourth.

Unfortunately, modern research often begins at the fourth step by testing a pre-conceived hypothesis or, just as bad, bypasses the scientific method and uses data collection and statistical gymnastics to search for insights into perceived problems.

This invariably gets people into trouble because they focus on association and neglect logical cause. (*Book-Firestick Ecology Vic Jurskis*)

We need to understand exactly how all native and non-native species in the park interact with each other, before we can take a more creative, strategic approach to managing what is in the park now, for example harnessing predator cascade control options.

Currently Parks continually spread pesticides onto parkland to kill off its top predator, the Dingo (wild dogs), then wonder why rabbit and cat populations increase, so more poison or shooting is needed, then bulldozes come to kill the species that a stable Dingo population would have carried out with no poison or machines being needed.

Until Parks Victoria start to learn about and apply, smarter ways to address conservation objectives for increased biodiversity, national park authorities will continue to repeat the kill and kill again, pesticide contaminate levels will continue to rise, mechanical slashing needed and one dead species will either feed another or allow its food of choice to multiply.

### ABA Recommendations

The solution we proposed last August has not been follow-up. Yet our plan offers a way to navigate the conflicting opinions that surround Wild Horse management, a chance to resolve this highly complex issue. Our offer is still open, but it cannot begin Parks Victoria and are prepared to “give it a fair go”.

This is a significant step forward as it requires Parks Victoria to keep moderate Wild Horse numbers in the Alpine areas where they have historically evolved. Therefore from a Heritage Wild Horse view point it is essential to identify the number of Heritage Wild Horses able to be retained in park areas that do not directly result in degradation and habitat loss.

Responsible management of Brumbies the park requires an ‘*Australian World First*’ scientific study to *target degradation and habitat loss* that applies proportionally to each native and non-native species in the park.

Currently if a Brumby is nearby, that is sufficient for Parks Victoria to claim the Brumby must be the cause all impacts around. Yet Brumby numbers are much lower than they have been in the past, and no species has become extinct due to the presence of Brumbies that have co-evolved with their parkland environment for 150 to 200 years.

To effectively deal with conflict all parties need to sit round the same table to contribute. There is *no* room for the “*it won’t work people*”, only room for those who are prepared to work in collaboration to agree study parameters, methodology and results.

Michelle Dawson recommended retaining the Brumby population to the level they were in 2001 (5,000) Brumbies. The current count of 2,350 is under half the number recommended by the researcher Michelle Dawson already.

### Concluding comments

If a researcher goes to an area where they are told horses live, and allocates blame for stream bank damage to the Brumby if a horse print or dung is nearby, and ignores other possible causes (175,000/1 million Sambar deer in Vic Alps alone. This means that for every single Brumby the ratio to Sambar deer is 320/426. Then include other species such as pig’s rabbits or extreme weather etc. Then ‘impact’ the researcher sees is due to horses.

This is not true science, at a minimum all causes need to be factored in, and compared to impacts in area where horses are not living. The researcher needs to identify which of the horse impacts are positive and which are negative, and then true planning can start.

**The Solution** the ABA and Victorian Brumby Association (VBA) have proposed is that we work with Parks Victoria for a five year period of robust studies that include;

- Mapping/identifying each individual horse on Bogong High Plains (BHP),
- Monitoring Brumby social behaviours, family mob interactions, feeding patterns etc.,
- Identifying each Brumby mob’s home range area and routine, and
- Monitoring positive and negative impacts over the five year period.

#### **The ABA & VBA position**

Bogong High Plains Heritage Brumbies must be retained as they represent irreplaceable, living cultural history (Context 2015 & Burra Charter) for future generations to experience. In the view of the ABA-VBA, to have Parks Victoria even consider the eradication of Bogong High Plains Heritage Brumbies, without due diligence – would be an in-defensible action and a tragic loss to future generations of Australians of their living BHP Brumbies Heritage.

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